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ABSTRACT

A content analysis compared the professional and research agendas of "Public Relations Journal" and "Public Relations Review" for the years 1975-81. A sample of 121 articles from the former and 111 articles from the latter were analyzed, and the content of each was assigned to one of 10 categories related to the context, profession, and process of public relations. Results showed that, whereas "Journal" articles were primarily concerned with the public relations process, the "Review" devoted almost equal attention to public relations context, profession, and process. "Journal" content dealt primarily with action and message strategies and techniques and with media usage and techniques, while that of the "Review" showed an equally disproportionate concern with social context and professionalism. The findings suggest that the research reported in the "Review" is not responsive to the program implementation interests of practitioners as reflected in "Journal" content, that neither publication provides sufficient information on the use of research in public relations, and that a relatively small portion of the content of these journals qualifies as theory building. (FL)

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Public Relations Division

# THE GAP BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL AND RESEARCH AGENDA: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS JOURNAL AND PUBLIC RELATIONS REVIEW

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# THE GAP BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL AND RESEARCH AGENDA: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS JOURNAL AND PUBLIC RELATIONS REVIEW

One of the continuing concerns of those involved in public relations practice, research and/or education is the professionalization of the field. Central to this concern is the body of knowledge basic to the practice.

Allen Center, assessing the status of the profession, raised the question, "Is the pyramid upside down?" He went on to say that "a profession without a body of knowledge and a growing bank of precedential information is like an inverted pyramid," and that "we do not now have enough information in the reservoir."[1] Yet, a generally-accepted prerequisite of a profession is a long period of education and training to acquire specialized skills based on a systematic body of knowledge.[2]

## The Problem and Literature

Several have contributed to our understanding of the foundation of knowledge underlying public relations. Ehling led the way in recent times by presenting a framework for defining the boundaries of public relations knowledge. In his theoretical analysis of the concepts of purposive behavior, conflict, social groups and community as they relate to public relations, he cited literature from such areas as philosophy of science, systems theory, analytical biology, operational research, management decision theory, information theory and cybernetics. While this is not a complete list of his reference areas, it is enough to suggest the

breadth of his search for a conceptual framework for the public relations process, the study of public relations and the construction of public relations theory.[3]

When Ehling's work appeared in the second issue of Public Relations Review in 1975, Grunig and his graduate students at the University of Maryland were surveying the literature in several disciplines to identify theoretical concepts useful in organizational communication and public relations research.[4] In addition to a list of research content areas, their study produced a critique of published public relations research, theses and dissertations. They found that most of the research related to public relations was being done by researchers in other fields, and that "little such research, or even theorizing, is being done by researchers whose primary interest is in public relations."[5] Their findings, however, dealt more with the type and quality of research rather than the specific content topics.

By the time Grunig presented his update on the status of public relations research at the 1978 Association for Education in Journalism Annual Convention in Seattle, Public Relations Review was in its fourth year of publication. Even though it had increased the number of research-based articles adding to the body of knowledge, he found little evidence to change his earlier feelings of discouragement with what was available to his students. He concluded that the status of public relations research was "not good."[6]

In addition to this conclusion, in his comments on another session at the same convention, Grunig pointed out the gap between practitioner and academic views of both the role of research and the nature of problems addressed in research. He suggested the differences result from the academic researcher's need to pursue ideas and theories that are relevant to a number of situations and organizations. This is

in contrast to the practitioner's understandable concern with specific situations and the day-to-day problems of one organization.[7]

Tirone, speaking at the 1978 AEJ convention, suggested that public relations researchers turn their attention to "field research directed toward resolution of 'practical problems'" and to use "less rigid " tests of significance.[8] He argued that public relations researchers should concentrate on "common-sense, practical research," saying he was inclined to leave the "crooked paths to unexpected conclusions" to "social psychologists of a mind to retravel them."[9] He concluded that "we have... a great deal to be modest about in discussing research done by public relations."[10] Yet in his scenario for the professionalization of public relations, he called for graduate degree curricula based on a "body of knowledge to carry forward."[11]

Next on the program, Lindenmann cited the evidence of increasing research activity in public relations and the publication of Public Relations Review as encouraging signs of the development and enhancement of public relations as a profession.[12] Unlike Tirone, however, he called for a move away from the "wheel-spinning stage to a truly effective system and theory-building stage" in the research effort.[13] Whether the research is directed toward applied problems or inspired by scientific curiousity, Lindenmann saw the need to show how the research relates to the central body of theory and "to what is happening elsewhere."[14]

Whereas Lindenmann suggested a continuing series of dialogues between academic researchers and researchers in the profession, McElreath used a delphi study to bring together the views of both professionals and academics in his list of "priority research questions in public relations for the 1980s."[15] Thirty scholars and professionals responded to McElreath's initial open-ended survey. In the second wave, the same panel rank ordered the edited and categorized research suggestions

submitted in the first survey. The final report presents the ordered listings of topical questions (from a purposive sample of unknown representativeness) intended to "point out what needs to be investigated."[16]

In summary, researchers from both the academic and professional settings have critiqued public relations research and called for changes in both its content and quality. There also is agreement on the need to develop a conceptual framework for organizing and relating the research efforts. While not agreeing on the severity of the problem, all perceive "two-worlds" of concerns and a gap between the practitioners' information needs and the theory-based research findings rewarded by academic institutions and research journals.

Their conclusions are based on analyses of the literature of other disciplines, theses and dissertations reporting public relations research, and personal experiences, as well as surveys of practitioners and scholars. None, however, turned to the major public relations media that reflect and/or influence the concerns of practitioners and researchers.

To the extent that the surveillance and agenda-setting functions of the mass media generalize to the professional literature, the major public relations publications should indicate both the specific concerns of the field and their relative saliences.[17] It was this imagery of the role of public relations literature that led us to undertake an inventory of content in Public Relations Journal and Public Relations Review.

## The Publications

Unlike those preceding us in this effort to shed new light on the body of knowledge related to public relations, we were able to study the content of seven

volumes of Public Relations Review. The Review represents a significant development in the professionalization of public relations. It is also a signal that the profession is in its embryonic stage in that only since 1975 has it had a journal devoted to research and comment of a scholarly nature.

The Review is a refereed scholarly journal published by the Foundation for Public Relations Research and Education, with its editorial office in the College of Journalism, University of Maryland. Circulation in 1981 averaged approximately 2,100 for the four issues, with a large secondary readership as a library reference.[18]

Public Relations Journal, on the other hand, is in its 38th year of publication, with a current circulation of about 4,500. The Journal is the professional journal of the major and oldest professional society, Public Relations Society of America, with its editorial office in New York City. As Editor Leo J. Northart said in the December 1981 issue:

> "The content of the Journal is determined by your information needs, which are further determined by personal and written or phone contacts, requests to PRSA's Information Center, and by keeping abreast of the subject areas and content of seminars and literature in the field. The comments I receive indicate that we are on target for the great majority of our readers."[19]

Content generally follows the "themes" established for the monthly issues: public relations and change, education and placement, new technology, investor relations, research and evaluation, international public relations, internal communication, corporate annual reports, audiovisuals, management of the function, corporate advertising, and expectations of the future that will affect the practice.

While there are other important publications in public relations, these two are probably the major references--other than textbooks--used by students of public relations. They also represent both the professional and academic concerns selected by a knowledgeable editorial staff at the Journal and a nationally-recognized

editorial review committee associated with the Review.

The Content Analyses

We began our study with an open-ended exploration of the literature cited in the first part of this paper, the annual indices of Journal articles, the index of Review Volumes 1-7, and sample issues of both the Journal and Review. Our objective was to develop a conceptual framework for codifying the content of the Journal and Review, as well as the approaches used by authors in their analyses and research efforts.

After several pretests, seminar discussions and revisions, we developed three major divisions of content which were subdivided into 10 content categories. Five treatment approach categories covered the range of techniques used by the authors.

Coding categories. Our categories were designed to provide, as nearly as our combined capabilities would allow, an exhaustive and mutually-exclusive set of classifications for both article content and treatment approaches. The 10 content categories represent components of the conceptual framework and spell out the operational definitions--content cues and indicators--used to specify the content thrust of articles. Likewise, the treatment approaches represent the five major methods of analysis and research used by the authors.[20]

Context. Content in this division deals with macro- and micro-level analyses of public relations in the larger society and in organizations.

1. Social context. Articles discuss social, cultural, political, economic, etc., conditions with respect to their impact on public relations; the role of public relations in society; and macro-level analyses of the functions and dysfunctions of public relations in the

larger social system. In other words, articles focus on the interrelationships of attributes of the social environment and the public relations subsystem.

2. Organizational context. Articles discuss attributes of organizations, institutionalized roles, and intra- and inter-departmental relationships as they relate to the public relations function in organizations. Articles report how the public relations function differs across organizations, how various organizational factors affect the public relations function, titles and structures of public relations departments, and the integration of the function into the larger organization (including agency-client relationships).

Profession. This content includes the professionalization of public relations practice, education for the profession and the practitioners themselves.

3. Professionalization. Articles relate to the professional standing of the practice, the professionalization of the practitioners, licensing, ethical standards, and the development of professional societies. Articles report cross-field comparisons, issues related to the body of knowledge underlying the profession, the role of education in professional development, and "state-of-the-profession."

4. Education. Articles analyze the educational preparation of practitioners. The focus is on attributes of the educational process, institutions offering public relations education, the programs offered, students and educators. Articles discuss the content of curricula and

courses, the nature of the educational experiences needed by students and professionals.

5. Practitioners. Content deals with attributes of the practitioners themselves. Reports of individual differences among practitioners, such as educational and professional backgrounds, incomes, titles, places in the organizational hierarchy, opinions and attitudes, as well as behaviors, belong in this set. The often-reported profile surveys also go here. Research in this category includes studies of the determinants of job performance and the relationships among other individual attributes.

Process. The practice of public relations involves practitioners and others in a management problem-solving process that begins with gathering information and ends with evaluating program results. Content that follows is organized according to the steps in that process.

6. Formative research, information input and intelligence. Articles discuss attributes of the information-gathering processes related to the organizational intelligence function. Sometimes called "formative research," this content deals with research and fact-finding for the purpose of guiding program planning. Articles discuss survey methods for monitoring public opinion, methods for incorporating social science research findings, other techniques for environmental surveillance, and futures research as a part of the public relations function. In short, content in this category embraces both the rationale and process of gathering information.

7. Management, planning and programming. Articles deal with attributes of the public relations decision-making process. They discuss

how information is factored into organizational decision, how programs are formulated and how the public relations function is managed. The range in this set could include a discussion of how management techniques apply to programs or specific tasks, a case study illustrating the value of crisis planning, and a systematic study of program planning processes in a variety of settings. The emphasis is on how to make decisions and plans, not on the specific content of those decisions and plans.

8. Action/message strategies and techniques. Articles on public relations program content are in this category--action strategies employed, as well as message content and techniques used. Characteristics of things done and things said, alternative message strategies tested and/or used, actual programs implemented, and management actions taken all relate to this category dealing with "what was done" and "how it was said."

9. Media usage and techniques. This category deals with attributes of the delivery systems used to get messages to target publics. Articles report media strategies, compare alternative media, introduce new media and media techniques, discuss media planning and costs, and explore the workings of media systems and institutions used in public relations programs. This content includes such things as using slides to tell a story, improving meetings and dealing more effectively with public affairs directors, editors and reporters.

10. Program impact, effects and evaluation research. In addition to discussions on the need for and techniques used in program evaluation, this category includes articles on specific program effects. The focus is on

the outcomes of public relations, their measurement and the determination of program effectiveness. The range of content could include a normative piece on the necessity of "summative research" in public relations program management, a methodological discussion of a particular technique for measuring media usage, and a data-based report of the impact of a program on specific variables of interest in a target public.

The treatment approaches in the analyses and research presented by authors range from straightforward presentations of undocumented opinions and personal philosophy, to the most rigorous application of the scientific methods to test theory-based hypotheses. We categorized the alternative treatments in five modes:

1. Philosophical or theoretical commentary. Articles present the personal knowledge, opinions and theoretical propositions of the authors. Personal observations, philosophical discussions and polemic presentations are typical styles used in articles put into this category.

2. Historical analysis or research. Analyses based on recollections, chronologies of long-past occurences, and causal explanations deduced from data in archival records are characteristic of this treatment category. The simplest treatment might be the straightforward presentation of the log of events related to an important event or person. The most rigorous treatment conforms to generally-accepted scientific methodology, but the observations come from historical records rather than the researcher's firsthand or mediated surveillance of the present situation.

3. Legal analysis or research. Legal treatments of the substantive content involve two major approaches. The first style is the traditional

legal advocacy based on normative assumptions and selected documentation. The second is the scientific marshalling of evidence to test propositions related to questions of legal precedent and process, legal reform, and impact of law in society and on public relations. Evidence in such studies may include court opinions, legislative documents, constitutions, regulations and scholarly commentaries.[21]

4. Case study or descriptive research. This treatment category includes reports based on relatively objective and systematic observations of phenomena. Through descriptions of events, behaviors, people and systems, the intent is to learn about associations among their attributes. The typical research design in this category does not allow for causal explanations, but represents the first step toward such understanding. Articles in this category range from narrative reports of situations, to the presentation of data gathered using scientific techniques.

5. Basic or applied analytical research. This treatment category includes research presentations in which the scientific method is used to test hypotheses deduced from theory. Using controlled, objective observation and measurement procedures, empirical evidence is gathered in an attempt to explain the relationships among phenomena. The result is a contribution to the systematic body of theory related to public relations. The purpose of the research effort may be either to improve the practice or to expand the knowledge base upon which the profession is based.

The Coders. The four coders represent a wide range of professional and academic experiences, research backgrounds and orientations. The project leader has a Ph.D. in Mass Communication, more than 10 years professional experience, and seven years teaching and research experience in the academic setting. He heads the Department of Journalism public relations emphasis and the Master of Science degree program in Mass Communication at San Diego State University.

The other three members of the research team are graduate students in the Mass Communication program. One holds a degree in journalism with an emphasis in public relations (from another university), has work experience outside the field, has had graduate coursework in both qualitative and quantitative research methods, and plans a career in public relations practice. Another has a sociology and cultural anthropology undergraduate degree, experience as a research assistant, research coursework in preparation for thesis research on international communication, and plans to continue studies toward a Ph.D. in Mass Communication. The fourth member of the team also plans to continue studies for a Ph.D. in Mass Communication, holds an undergraduate degree in communication, professional experience as editorial assistant in a publishing house and as editorial director for jointly-owned AM-FM radio stations.

It was this diversity of backgrounds and orientations that helped us more objectively and critically analyze public relations content without falling victim to the preconceived notions that could have prevailed in a more monolithic group socialized in the traditions, terminology and values of public relations.

The Pretests and Pilot Test. Pretesting indicated a reliability problem related to the content coding of the two journals. We found that often the manifest content of Review articles is not limited to only one of our content categories. An example is the article by Earl Hutchinson, "Micro-Relations for Students and Practitioners," Public Relations Review, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Fall 1980), pp. 23-32.

The author deals with communication and relationships between the public relations practitioner and various internal and external publics, calling these "micro-relations." And while he devotes considerable attention to "(1) personal relations, (2) personal communication, and (3) protective relations," his overriding concern in the article is with the educational needs of the "next generation of practitioners." His assertions throughout the article are directed to affecting the content of public relations education and showing how his concepts apply to the practice. The latter content is used to support his argument for "proper instruction and attentiveness to micro-relations" in academic programs.

This case is typical of the coding problems which produced relatively low levels of agreement among the four coders with respect to Review content.

Inter-coder agreement in the first pretest ranged from .40 to .70, with a mean of .55. Study of the articles upon which we did not agree revealed the multiple-content problem illustrated above. In our discussions and reviews of articles, however, we found that the detailed dissections of articles usually led to a consensus on the major content thrust. Subsequent pretests and the pilot test indicated that as we practiced assigning articles to categories, the impact of our varied backgrounds and levels of familiarity with public relations concepts and issues diminished with each trial.

In order to produce a final coding of the content, however, we decided to use a two-step process. First, we would do individual coding and then we would together analyze articles on which our individual codings differed. The result of this process would be a consensus inventory of the content of the Review.

While the same two-step process was used to resolve other differences in coding, the pilot test indicated relatively high levels of agreement on the treatment approaches used by the authors of Review articles. The six inter-coder reliability scores on the treatment categories ranged from .80 to .90, with a mean of .87. Our reliability scores for Journal content averaged .74 and we found little variance in the treatment approaches used by authors in this publication. The latter observation led to the decision to code only the content in the Journal.

The Census and Sample. The complete population of articles published in the Review, Volumes 1-7 (1975-81), were analyzed, producing a census of the content of this publication. Three "articles" were later dropped from the tables because they were introductions to and overviews of articles to follow. The census included 111 Review articles.

Approximately 605 substantive articles--not counting descriptions of upcoming PRSA conventions and listings of newly accredited members--were published in the Journal during the concurrent period, 1975-81 (Volumes 31-37). To select a systematic sample of approximately the same number of articles included in the Review census, we selected every fifth article after beginning the count in each volume on a randomly selected number within the interval. The resulting sample included 121 articles.

The coding. The unit of analysis for coding was an entire article, as each was assigned to a single content and treatment category. We found that while Journal issues are based on monthly themes, the actual content is sometimes only marginally related to the theme. Likewise, some titles of Review articles were misleading in terms of portraying the major content emphases. As a result, we had to skim read or read in detail every article coded.

In the first phase of the content analyses, two coders categorized the 111 articles from the Review onto the content-by-treatment 50-cell matrix. Their initial inter-coder reliability levels were 65 percent agreement on content and 79 percent agreement on treatment. Concurrently, the other two coders assigned the 121 articles sampled from the Journal with a reliability score of 65 percent agreement across the 10 content categories.

During the second phase of the analyses, we went through the individual codings to indentify and resolve differences in assignments. In the case of the Journal, differences were easily reconciled through discussions based on coders' notes and reviews of the actual articles. Review coding differences were resolved through detailed discussions and reanalyses involving all four coders. These time-consuming processes produced the consensus coding results on 232 articles presented in the findings.

We present the reliability scores to signal the problems of stability, reproducibility and accuracy encountered in our attempt to assign complex and compound content units to the single categories that best represent the major subject matter of the articles. The consensus coding represents our resolution of coding differences, but must be qualified by pointing out that even it may differ slightly from how other coders might categorize some articles. The major

impact of the consensus phase of the coding was to minimize systematic variance introduced by individual coders. To that extent, we are confident that our final codings could be reproduced by other panels of investigators.

The Content

Journal content reflects practitioners' day-to-day concerns with how to do their jobs: two-thirds of the articles dealt with the process of public relations. Two of the process categories included 45 percent of the sample--Action/Message Strategy and Techniques, and Media Usage and Techniques. Another process category--Management, Planning and Programming--tied with Social Context as the third most frequent categories of Journal content. (See Table 1.)

Surprisingly, in the face of the often expressed interest in measurement and evaluation in public relations circles, the Journal included little substantive content dealing with research in either the formulation or evaluation of public relations programs. Only Education received less coverage.

(Insert Table 1 about here.)

There was no apparent shift in emphasis over the seven years studied. Overall, 22 percent of the articles related to the context of public relations, 12 percent to the profession, and 66 percent to the process. (See Table 2.) While 1977 and 1980 appear to deviate from the overall distribution, the small sample size within each year precludes making such judgments.

(Insert Table 2 about here.)

TABLE 1

PUBLIC RELATIONS JOURNAL CONTENT

| | 1975 | 1976 | 1977 | 1978 | 1979 | 1980 | 1981 | Total | Percent of Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Social Context | 2 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 17 | 14% |
| 2. Organizational Context | | 3 | 1 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 10 | 8 |
| 3. Professionalization | 2 | 1 | | 1 | 2 | | 1 | 7 | 6 |
| 4. Education | | | | 2 | | | | 2 | 2 |
| 5. Practitioners | 1 | | | 1 | | 2 | 1 | 5 | 4 |
| 6. Formative Research, Information Input and Intelligence | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | | 5 | 4 |
| 7. Management, Planning and Programming | 4 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 4 | | 2 | 17 | 14 |
| 8. Action/Message Strategy and Techniques | 3 | 5 | 6 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 26 | 22 |
| 9. Media Usage and Techniques | 4 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 4 | 4 | 7 | 28 | 23 |
| 10. Program Impact, Effects and Evaluation Research | 1 | | 1 | | 2 | | | 4 | 3 |
| Totals | 17 | 16 | 16 | 20 | 19 | 16 | 17 | 121 | 100% |

TABLE 2

PUBLIC RELATIONS JOURNAL CONCEPTUAL CONTENT

| | 1975 | 1976 | 1977 | 1978 | 1979 | 1980 | 1981 | Total | Percent of Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Context | 2 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 7 | 4 | 27 | 22 |
| Profession | 3 | 1 | | 4 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 14 | 12 |
| Process | 12 | 10 | 13 | 12 | 15 | 7 | 11 | 80 | 66 |

By contrast, Review content was almost equally distributed over the three major conceptual categories, with 28 percent of the articles related to the context of public relations, 36 percent to the profession, and 36 percent to the process. Four years stand out as departures from this pattern and more or less cancel each other out in the overall distribution. In 1976 and 1979, the emphasis was on the profession. More than half of the Review articles dealt with the process in 1977. In 1978,more than half covered topics related to the context of public relations. (See Table 3.)

TABLE 3

PUBLIC RELATIONS REVIEW CONCEPTUAL CONTENT

| | 1975 | 1976 | 1977 | 1978 | 1979 | 1980 | 1981 | Total | Percent of Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Context | 3 | 5 | 6 | 8 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 31 | 28% |
| Profession | 4 | 8 | 4 | 4 | 9 | 4 | 6 | 40 | 36 |
| Process | 5 | 5 | 11 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 4 | 40 | 36 |

Within these major conceptual areas, the Social Context category with 21 percent of the articles and Professionalization with 20 percent stand out as the major topics covered in the Review. (See Table 4.) Articles are almost equally distributed over the remaining categories, with the smallest percentage (actually less than five percent) in Action/Message Strategy and Techniques.

TABLE 4

PUBLIC RELATIONS REVIEW CONTENT

| | 1975 | 1976 | 1977 | 1978 | 1979 | 1980 | 1981 | Total | Percent of Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Social Context | 3 | 3 | 5 | 7 | | 2 | 3 | 23 | 21% |
| 2. Organizational Context | | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 8 | 7 |
| 3. Professionalization | 1 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 6 | 1 | 5 | 22 | 20 |
| 4. Education | 2 | 1 | 2 | | | 3 | | 8 | 7 |
| 5. Practitioners | 1 | 2 | | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 10 | 9 |
| 6. Formative Research, Information Input and Intelligence | 2 | | 4 | 1 | | 2 | | 9 | 8 |
| 7. Management, Planning and Programming | 2 | 1 | 2 | | 3 | 1 | 1 | 10 | 9 |
| 8. Action/Message Strategy and Techniques | | 1 | 1 | 2 | | 1 | | 5 | 5 |
| 9. Media Usage and Techniques | | 3 | | 1 | 2 | | 3 | 9 | 8 |
| 10. Program Impact, Effects and Evaluation Research | 1 | | 4 | | | 2 | | 7 | 6 |
| Totals | 12 | 18 | 21 | 16 | 15 | 14 | 15 | 111 | 100% |

The primary treatment approaches used by the authors of Review articles were Philosophical or Theoretical Commentary (35 percent) and Case Study or Descriptive Research (32 percent). Legal Analysis or Research was the least used approach with only three percent of the articles in this category. The remaining articles were almost equally divided between Historical Analysis or Research and Basic or Applied Analytical Research. (See Table 5.)

TABLE 5

PUBLIC RELATIONS REVIEW TREATMENT APPROACHES

| | 1975 | 1976 | 1977 | 1978 | 1979 | 1980 | 1981 | Total | Percent of Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Philosophical or Theoretical Commentary | 6 | 6 | 8 | 3 | 10 | 4 | 4 | 39 | 35% |
| 2. Historical Analysis or Research | 1 | 4 | 1 | 8 | | 3 | 1 | 18 | 18 |
| 3. Legal Analysis or Research | | | 1 | | 1 | | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| 4. Case Study or Descriptive Research | 3 | 4 | 10 | 4 | 1 | 6 | 7 | 35 | 32 |
| 5. Basic or Applied Analytical Research | 2 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 16 | 14 |
| Totals | 12 | 18 | 21 | 16 | 15 | 14 | 15 | 111 | 100% |

Treatments in the 1978 volume were heavily skewed toward historical approaches and 1979 was clearly the year for commentaries. The other apparent pattern is that theory-building analytical research is not a major approach used by public relations scholars, whereas descriptive research and case studies dominate in public relations research.

Because our analysis was a census of Review articles, the frequencies in Tables 3, 4 and 5 represent the actual distributions of content and treatments.

Table 6 presents the complete content-by-treatment matrix for the Review articles. Other than the many empty cells in the matrix, several patterns deserve attention. Social Context content took the form of Philosophical or Theoretical Commentary and Historical Analysis or Research. Media Usage and Techniques, as well as Program Impact, Effects and Evaluation Research articles were more or

less limited to the Case Study or Descriptive Research and Basic or Applied Analytical Research categories. The concentration and dispersion of content within the Commentary and Case Study or Descriptive Research columns suggests that the most accurate subtitle for the Review would be, "A Journal of Descriptive Research and Comment."

TABLE 6

PUBLIC RELATIONS REVIEW CONTENT BY TREATMENT

| | Philosophical or Theoretical Commentary | Historical Analysis or Research | Legal Analysis or Research | Case Study or Descriptive Research | Basic or Applied Analytical Research |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Social Context | 10 | 8 | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| 2. Organizational Context | 3 | | | 3 | 2 |
| 3. Professionalization | 11 | 3 | | 6 | 2 |
| 4. Education | 2 | | | 6 | |
| 5. Practitioners | | 4 | | 4 | 2 |
| 6. Formative Research, Information Input and Intelligence | 6 | | | 3 | |
| 7. Management, Planning and Programming | 6 | | 1 | | 3 |
| 8. Action/Message Strategy and Techniques | | 2 | | 2 | 1 |
| 9. Media Usage and Techniques | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 2 |
| 10. Program Impact, Effects and Evaluation Research | | | | 4 | 3 |
| Totals (N=111) | 39 | 18 | 3 | 35 | 16 |
| Percent of Total | 35% | 16% | 3% | 32% | 14% |

Comparisons of Content

Journal and Review content compared across the three major conceptual divisions indicates a statistically significant difference in the distributions ($\chi^2 = 24.8$, df = 2, $p < .001$, two-tailed test).

TABLE 7

COMPARISON OF JOURNAL AND REVIEW CONCEPTUAL CONTENT

| | Percent of Content | |
|---|---|---|
| | Journal (n=121) | Review (N=111) |
| Context | 22% | 28% |
| Profession | 12 | 36 |
| Process | 66 | 36 |

$\chi^2 = 24.8$, df=2, $p < .001$, two-tailed test.

The agenda portrayed by the Journal is much more heavily weighted on the process than is the agenda reflected by Review content. And whereas the Journal devotes relatively little of its content to analyses of the profession, the Review gives this conceptual area an equal place on the agenda as that ascribed to the process. Thus, the much-discussed "gap" between the agenda of practitioners and scholars receives empirical support when the content of these two publications is compared.

Table 8 presents a more detailed comparison of Journal and Review content across the 10 content categories. The most striking differences occur in the comparisons of the Social Context and Professionalization categories to which the

Review devotes major attention. A similar disparity in the opposite direction is found in the differences in content emphases for Action/Message Strategy and Techniques, and Media Usage and Techniques. These two categories dominate Journal content but receive relatively little attention in the Review. The differences in the two distributions are statistically significant at the $p < .001$ level.

TABLE 8

COMPARISON OF JOURNAL AND REVIEW CONTENT

| | Percent of Content | |
|---|---|---|
| | Journal (n=121) | Review (N=111) |
| Social Context | 14% | 21% |
| Organizational Context | 8 | 7 |
| Professionalization | 6 | 20 |
| Education | 2 | 7 |
| Practitioners | 4 | 9 |
| Formative Research, Information Input and Intelligence | 4 | 8 |
| Management, Planning and Programming | 14 | 9 |
| Action/Message Strategy and Techniques | 22 | 5 |
| Media Usage and Techniques | 23 | 8 |
| Program Impact, Effects and Evaluation Research | 3 | 6 |
| | 100% | 100% |

$\chi^2 = 42.3$, $df = 9$, $p < .001$, two-tailed test.

In summary, different agenda of concerns are reflected by the articles in the Journal and Review during the seven years of concurrent publication, 1975-81. Whereas Journal articles are primarily concerned with the public relations process

(80 percent of the articles), the Review devotes almost equal attention to public relations context, profession and process issues. Specifically, Journal content deals primarily with Action/Message Strategy and Techniques, and Media Usage and Techniques. The Review, by contrast, assigns an equally disproporationate amount of its content agenda to Social Context and Professionalization. And even though the Review is the only scholarly journal in the field, the dominant treatments of content take the form of Philosophical or Theoretical Commentary and Descriptive Research or Case Study approaches.

## Conclusions

We began this paper with the concerns expressed by several regarding the content and quality of public relations research. Our objectives in the content analyses were to empirically determine and compare the manifest agenda of Public Relations Journal and Public Relations Review. We found major differences.

It was not the province of this study, however, to explain why these differences occur or to judge the relative merits of the two publications' content. We surmise that the Journal accurately reflects practitioners' primary concerns with day-to-day problems in implementing public relations programs. The Journal agenda also exposes the paucity of information and authors dealing with the uses of research in program formulation and evaluation.

The latter observation probably serves equally well to explain why the Review contains so little content on research. This scholarly publication's attention to the social context and professionalization of public relations may indicate the authors' responsiveness to practitioners' concerns about their roles and status in society. We think these content emphases mirror the historical concerns of an emerging profession

searching for a collective identity and justification for the practice. The Review agenda portrays such a preoccupation with professional introspection.

We offer three qualified conclusions: first, the commentaries and research published in the Review are not responsive to the program implementation interests of practicing professionals. Second, both publications provide little to help students, teachers, practitioners and managers understand and use research in public relations. And third, as Grunig observed about public relations research in general, the Review offers relatively little cross-situational, theory-building research that adds to the systematic body of knowledge upon which the practice is based.

The qualification we must put on these conclusions is that they are conditioned to some unknown degree by how representative Journal and Review content is of professional and scholarly concerns. We picked these two publications, however, because we judged them to be the most accurate barometers of the field.

Before you conclude that we think we sit apart from the problems noted in this paper, we should end by pleading "mea culpa." We would code this paper as "Descriptive Research" about "Professionalization."

Footnotes

[1] Allen H. Center, "The State of the Art: Is the Pyramid Upside Down," Public Relations Journal, Vol. 36, No. 7 (July 1980), pp. 21-22.

[2] Jack M. McLeod and Searle E. Hawley, Jr., "Professionalization Among Newsmen," Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 46, No. 3 (Autumn 1964), pp. 529-39.

[3] William P. Ehling, "PR Administration, Management Science and Purposive Systems," Public Relations Review, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Fall 1975), pp. 15-42.

[4] James E. Grunig and Ronald H. Hickson, "An Evaluation of Academic Research in Public Relations," Public Relations Review, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Spring 1976), pp. 31-43.

[5] Ibid., p. 36.

[6] James E. Grunig, "The Status of Public Relations Research." Paper presented to the Public Relations Division, Association for Education in Journalism Annual Convention, Seattle, Washington, August 1978.

[7] _____, "Special Section: The Two Worlds of PR Research," Public Relations Review, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Spring 1979), pp. 11-14.

[8] James F. Tirone, "Education, Theory, and Research in Public Relations," Public Relations Review, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Spring 1979), p. 23.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., p. 24.

[11] Ibid., p. 22.

[12] Walter K. Lindenmann, "The Missing Link in Public Relations Research," Public Relations Review, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Spring 1979), pp. 26-36.

[13] Ibid., p. 35.

[14] Ibid., p. 29.

[15] Mark P. McElreath, Priority Research Questions in Public Relations for the 1980s (New York: Foundation for Public Relations Research and Education,[1980])

[16] Ibid., p. 6.

[17] Maxwell McCombs, "Agenda Setting Function of Mass Media," Public Relations Review, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Winter 1977), pp. 89-95.

[18] "Statement of Ownership, Management and Circulation," Public Relations Review, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Fall 1981), p. 51.

[19] Leo J. Northart, "Editor's Notebook," Public Relations Journal, Vol. 37, No. 12 (December 1981), p. 32.

[20] Our references for the content analysis procedures were Klaus Krippendorff, Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, Inc., 1980) and Richard Budd, Robert K. Thorp and Lewis Donohew, Content Analysis of Communications (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967).

[21] Guido H. Stempel,III, and Bruce H. Westley, eds., Research Methods in Mass Communication (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1981), pp. 320-23.